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RX Trafficking Ring Controlled Brooklyn Medical Practices: Nearly \$3.4 Million In Pills Diverted



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RX Trafficking Ring Controlled Brooklyn Medical Practices: Nearly \$3.4 Million In Pills Diverted

(MANHATTAN, N.Y.) - Brian R. Crowell, Special Agent in Charge, Drug Enforcement (DEA), New York Division, Bridget G. Brennan, New York City's Special Narcotics Prosecutor, New York City Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly, Tom F. O'Donnell, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General New York (HHS-OIG), and New York State Commissioner of Health Nirav R. Shah, M.D., M.P.H., announced today the indictment and arrest of five members of a prescription drug trafficking ring that illegally collected and distributed over \$3.4 million in oxycodone and other prescription drugs through medical offices they controlled in Brooklyn.

A nine-month wiretap investigation revealed that ring leader Sergey Plotits established medical offices in Sheepshead Bay, and other neighborhoods in Brooklyn, for the sole purpose of illegally collecting and distributing large quantities of highly addictive prescription medication. Among those charged in the indictment filed by the Special Narcotics Prosecutor's Prescription Drug Investigation Unit, is Zhanna Kanevsky, a physician hired by Plotits to write prescriptions at a medical office he established at 1763 East 12th Street in Sheepshead Bay. Defendants Rostislav Vilshteyn, Emil Shumunov and Alla Kuratova allegedly recruited other individuals to act as phony patients in visits with the corrupt medical practitioners.

The investigation was spearheaded by the DEA's New York City Tactical Diversion (TDS-NY), comprised of agents and officers from the DEA, the New York City Police (NYPD), the Town of Orangetown Police Department and the Westchester County Department of Public Safety.

Detectives, investigators and agents from the NYPD's Brooklyn South Narcotics Division, the New York State Health Department Bureau of Narcotic (BNE), HHS-OIG and the New York State Department of Financial Services also participated in this investigation.

Four of the five defendants were arrested yesterday morning. Agents seized medical records in a court authorized search of Kanevsky's home at 28 Keppel Avenue on Staten Island. Kanevsky is expected to be arraigned later today.

Plotits and Vilshteyn were arraigned yesterday before Manhattan Supreme Court Justice Bruce Allen in Part 45, 111 Centre St., where they pleaded not guilty. Shumunov is awaiting extradition in New Jersey. Kuratova was previously arrested on June 18 and is expected to be arraigned at a later date.

Over the course of the conspiracy charged in the indictment, which ran from August 2011 to the present, the defendants illegally collected and distributed over 180,000 pills of prescription drugs, including approximately 170,000 pills of oxycodone, a potent type of narcotic painkiller, and nearly 12,000 pills of (Xanax), a highly addictive anti-anxiety medication. Evidence of the conspiracy includes prescription records, recorded phone conversations, law enforcement surveillance and testimony from multiple witnesses.

In carrying out the scheme, Plotits identified and secured locations for use as medical practices in the vicinity of Sheepshead Bay and elsewhere. Plotits then hired medical professionals licensed to prescribe controlled substances, including Kanevsky.

Meanwhile, Vilshteyn, Shumunov and Kuratova recruited individuals they knew to pose as patients and obtain prescriptions from the medical practitioners employed by Plotits. The phony patients were paid in cash for obtaining the prescriptions.

The investigation revealed that medical practitioners employed by Plotits generally failed to perform examinations on these phony patients. The drug ring paid these corrupt medical practitioners by the hour or by the day.

During the 17 months that Kanevsky worked for Plotits, from January 2012 until May 2013, she wrote prescriptions for approximately 100,000 pills of oxycodone and 5,000 pills of Xanax to these phony patients. These pills carry a combined street value of approximately \$2 million.

In some instances, members of the drug ring directed the phony patients to fill prescriptions in particular pharmacies, using cash or Medicaid. The phony patients then collected the oxycodone or Xanax pills and handed them over to the drug ring. In other instances, the recruits handed the signed prescription sheet directly to Vilshteyn, Shumunov and Kuratova.

Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget G. Brennan thanked the DEA's New York City Tactical Diversion Squad, the Special Narcotics Prescription Drug Investigation Unit and Investigators Unit, the Kings County District Attorney's Office, the Richmond County District Attorney's Office, the New York City Police Department, the Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement, the Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General and New York State Department of Financial Services.

DEA Special Agent in Charge Brian R. Crowell stated, "Every day, we read about the dramatic increase in Rx pain med abuse and its effect throughout our country. Just two weeks ago, the Center for Disease (CDC) reported that almost one million women were seen in emergency medical departments for drug misuse or abuse in one year. Opiate abuse is the major drug threat

to all segments of our society. Similar to the heroin dealers and pushers on street corners, opiate addicts are lining up to see rogue doctors in order to get prescriptions from drug dealers hiding behind white coats. Rogue medical professionals know exactly what they are supplying, and the inherent dangers associated with pain pill trafficking. Law enforcement at all levels has collaborated to create tactical diversion squads in order to stop this devastating drug abuse by identifying and investigating those responsible for diverting pain medication from those who medically need it to those who use it to endanger themselves and the safety of the communities they live in."

"This criminal enterprise brazenly set up an office and recruited medical professionals solely to write pain pill prescriptions for phony patients," said Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget G. Brennan. "The investigation uncovered corrupt medical professionals, armed with prescription pads and pens, flooding the black market with more than one hundred thousand highly addictive pills. The conduct is dangerous and destructive, and, with our law enforcement partners, we will ensure that it is punished appropriately."

Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly said, "The NYPD announced earlier this year a plan to combat the illicit distribution of drugs such as oxycodone through a combination of education, outreach, and investigative initiatives. The takedown of this ring is representative of that effort and serves as a warning to those who seek to exploit medicine for profit and would recklessly wreak devastating consequences on the public's health and safety. I thank the NYPD Brooklyn South Narcotics detectives, their partners in Bridget Brennan's office and all the agents who worked to develop this case."

"These arrests highlight the growing problem of drug diversion in America," said Tom O'Donnell, Special Agent in Charge, Office of Inspector General, Department of Health and Human Services, New York region. "HHS will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to combat prescription drug fraud at all levels. We must protect Federal health programs from criminals who abuse the system to fuel this epidemic."

"The conduct described in this indictment illustrates the scope of damage that can be caused when medical professionals seek to abuse and illegally profit from their licenses and positions," said State Health Commissioner Nirav. R. Shah, M.D., M.P.H. "As the epidemic of prescription drug abuse continues in this country, law enforcement and public health officials need to be ever vigilant against diversion of prescription medications. The State Health Department is proud to assist the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor, the DEA, and all other agencies in holding responsible those individuals who violate their Hippocratic Oath. Further, by employing new public health strategies, such as overseeing the implementation of I-STOP and the new Prescription Monitoring Program, the Department is proud to work with the overwhelming majority of dedicated members of the medical and pharmacy communities to address the underlying public health crisis that is helping fuel these criminal activities."

The charges and allegations are merely accusations and the defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.



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